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TANGLING WITH BOBCATS, WOLVES ALL IN DAY'S WORK FOR HUNTERS

Capturing outlaws on the plains of Texas is a tough job for any man, but when the outlaws are 30 to 50 pounds of savage, clawing fury, then "tough" is an inadequate word to describe the hazards facing the Government hunter assigned to capture predatory bobcats and wolves, says the Fish and Wildlife Service in a report to Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes.

Bob Calhoun, whose territory covers Refugio County, Texas, doesn't think his work is unusual, but the report shows otherwise. Calhoun has tracked down about 75 bobcats and 350 red wolves during the past 3 years.

"There's nothing to it," his report stated. "You just have to be a bit careful and know your animals." Knowing animals is an all-inclusive expression for knowledge of the food habits, range, personal peculiarities, and fighting traits of each animal the hunter tracks. When a 30-pound bobcat decides to argue it out with the hunter at close range, the hunter must not only know what his opponent most likely will do but he must be lightning fast, physically, to grapple with the pugnacious animal.

Taking bobcats and wolves is no pleasure for Calhoun; It's a job. His attitude is "Live and Let Live." But when a wolf or bobcat invades a rancher's

range or "backyard" and attacks turkeys, pigs, deer, or calves, the rancher usually doesn't like it.

If the offending animal repeats its nightly forays too often, the rancher refers the matter to the County authorities and asks that something be done about it. That's when Calhoun is called in. The County pays a share of the hunter's salary, and the Fish and Wildlife Service pays the balance.

Each job is an individual problem, according to Calhoun. While bobcats and wolves have general traits peculiar to each species, the individual animals have characteristics of their own. The hunter must learn these characteristics if he expects to catch the outlaw.

Crip, so named because he had a clubbed forefoot, was a well-known calf killer in Texas and a wary animal. Crip had a tooth for tender calf meat. Under cover of night, the wolf would sneak into the cattle herds on the ranges and help himself to choice morsels here and there. On one ranch alone Crip's tell-tale tracks were found around seven dead, partly eaten calves.

It took Calhoun 4 months to trap the wary wolf. A long trap line had been set out along the several routes Crip customarily traveled in his nightly ~~ma~~raudings.

Incidentally, every trap is visited at least once a day. Calhoun visits some traps more than once a day, if he has an idea where the animal will most likely be caught. The stomachs of animals taken, wolves and bobcats, are turned over to the Service's scientists who conduct food habit studies.

Most bobcats are like "The Old Turkey Killer," a wolf that, according to ranchers, was known to kill as many as 75 turkeys a day. The Old Turkey Killer

operated in Refugio County for 2 or 3 years before he was taken. He was also charged with taking chickens on the nest, apparently just for the pleasure of killing.

The average weight of the wolves is 35 pounds, but Calhoun recently took one calf-killer that weighed 58 pounds.

"Bobcats aren't so bad on calves," the Texan said, "but they like their turkeys, chickens, and pigs." Bobcats, lighter than wolves, average 26 pounds and are just as hard to handle. The biggest bobcat Calhoun caught was a 42-pound animal that committed mayhem in turkey and chicken yards.

"That feller just killed to kill, I guess, because he often wiped out whole flocks of turkeys without even eatin' any," the hunter said. "I don't know why that cat did it, unless it was just plain meanness."

Though both animals are hard to catch, Calhoun thinks the bobcat is "a little bit easier than the wolf. A wolf is smarter, especially if he has been trapped once before."

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